Let's think about...
Schemas

A 1 hour staff meeting template to use with your team.

Objective:
To deepen staff understanding of schemas and explore ways to recognise and support them in practice.

Rationale:

Children learn best through exploration, play, and repetition. Schemas—repeated patterns of behaviour—are a key part of that learning for some children, helping them to develop cognitive connections and understand the world around them in their own unique way. By recognising and responding to schemas, early years educators can:

- **Enhance learning experiences** by tailoring activities to children's natural interests.
- **Support deeper engagement** by providing resources and opportunities that align with their learning patterns.
- **Create an inclusive environment** where all children's ways of learning are acknowledged and valued.

This staff meeting plan aims to guide you through supporting your team to build confidence in identifying and supporting schemas in practice.

Please note: Activities marked * have supporting resources available at the end of the document.

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Agenda:

Overview (10 mins)

- Invite staff to briefly share what they know about schemas and why they matter.
- Summarise discussions to create a shared understanding, highlighting-
- What schemas are and how identifying them can help tailor learning experiences to children's intrinsic interests.
- The importance of considering schemas as part of observations and planning.

Exercise 1: Observing and Supporting Schemas (20 mins)

Option 1: Discussion Based on Real Observations
In small groups staff choose a child displaying a particular schema and discuss:

- What have you observed about this child's play and behaviour?
- What do you already have in place to support this?
- What challenges have arisen when supporting this schema?

How could you further support and extend their learning?

* Option 2: Scenario-Based Discussion

Read the scenario and discuss:

- What are the key factors of this child's play and behaviour?
- Which schema might this child be displaying **(use the schema table)**
- What might you put in place to support this schema?
- What might the challenges be?

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**Exercise 2: Environment Audit (20 mins)

- Staff use the audit template to assess how well their environment supports a particular schema.
- The focus should be a different schema type from Exercise 1.

  Tip: You can revisit this exercise in future staff meetings, exploring different types of schemas each time.

Reflection and Next Steps (10 mins)

- Share key takeaways from group discussions.
- Agree at least two actions for how schemas can be embedded into planning, observation and continuous provision.
- Decide on a follow-up session to explore additional schemas.

Supporting resources available: see following pages

Schema Types Table – A reference guide outlining common schemas and examples of how children might display them.
Scenario – A case study for discussion if staff cannot identify a child's schema.
Schema Audit Template – A tool for evaluating how well the environment supports schema-driven.

Further Reading:

- Read this Blog on the SPH website: How Schema Theory Might Help Us Support Children's Communication Development
- Read this EEF guidance on Improving Early Education through High Quality Interactions
- Read More about planning for children's interests in Development Matters
- Read about Schemas in Birth - 5 Matters

Would you like a staff meeting template like this one about a specific topic?
Get in touch to let us know what you would find helpful at your setting by emailing us on
sph@beyth.co.uk

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Schema Types Table

Schema Type	What It Looks Like in Play	Suggestions for how to Support It
Trajectory (Movement)	Throwing, dropping, rolling, or moving objects in straight lines; fascination with running, jumping, or watching things move.	Provide balls, ramps, water play, scarves, bubbles, and outdoor space for running and jumping.
Transporting (Moving Objects)	Carrying objects from one place to another, filling and emptying bags, baskets, or pockets.	Offer trolleys, bags, baskets, wheelbarrows, and containers for collecting and moving objects.
Rotation (Spinning & Turning)	Enjoys turning knobs, wheels, or lids; fascinated by spinning objects like tops, washing machines, or rolling themselves around.	Provide spinning tops, wheels, mixing activities, roundabouts, and painting with circular motions.
Enclosing (Creating Boundaries)	Drawing circles around objects, enclosing spaces with blocks, wrapping things up, or hiding inside small spaces.	Offer boxes, tunnels, small dens, playdough for wrapping, and materials for making enclosures.
Enveloping (Covering & Wrapping)	Covering themselves or objects with fabric, hiding under blankets, wrapping items in paper.	Provide scarves, fabric, dressing-up clothes, and wrapping materials.
Connecting (Joining & Separating)	Enjoys joining objects together (e.g., Lego, train tracks), tying things up, or taking things apart.	Offer construction toys, linking cubes, sticky tape, string, and Velcro materials.
Positioning (Ordering & Arranging)	Lines up objects in a specific order, arranges items symmetrically, prefers things 'just so'.	Provide loose parts, pattern-making activities, sorting games, and block play.
Orientation (Changing Viewpoints)	Looks at things from different angles, hangs upside down, tilts head, or climbs to change perspective.	Allow safe climbing opportunities, mirrors, periscopes, and different height levels for play.
Transforming (Changing Substances)	Mixing materials, adding water to sand or paint, exploring changes in texture.	Provide sensory play, cooking activities, mud kitchens, and mixing stations.

Scenario

2-year-old Shay is new to the setting. She has generally settled well and is already showing a preference for several areas of the nursery. She can often be found playing in the sand area, using a spade to fill buckets before emptying them again, or engaging in similar play at the water station, repeatedly filling and pouring.

Shay finds mealtimes challenging, often tipping her plate upside down. Tidy-up time is also difficult, as she struggles to transition away from activities and will empty toys out after they have been packed away.

Shay's parents have shared that she has been exhibiting the same behaviours at home for a while now and they have been unsure what to do about it.

Schema Audit Template

Which schemas have you observed in your setting? (Tick all that apply. You may also wish to add children's initials where applicable)

☐ Trajectory   ☐ Enclosing   ☐ Positioning
☐ Transporting   ☐ Enveloping   ☐ Orientation
☐ Rotation   ☐ Connecting   ☐ Transforming

For a schema of your choice, consider how well your environment supports it.

Schema Type:	Reflections & Actions for Improvement
What resources and materials do you provide?	
Are there enough opportunities indoors to explore this schema?	
Are there enough opportunities outdoors to explore this schema?	
Consider examples of how you actively recognise and extend learning opportunities related to this schema in practice?	